

Production Suited to Indian Conditions

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Play production is an art of recreating an author's vision by a group of artists, who take his vision to an audience. His phantom idea is interpreted and transformed into visual and audible presentation by acting, scenery, lighting, costumes, music, dance and make-up. While speaking of production, we speak of all these factors arranged together into a pleasing design, not static but continuously changing, yet maintaining the harmony of the whole. This, therefore, means taking up each of these factors separately, assessing them, and drawing inferences to guide our productions.

Plays, theatre halls, lighting equipment, actors make or mar a stage presentation. In the hands of a capable producer, a play can be artistically presented even when the facilities are limited. Size of the canvas has never decided the quality of a painting.

Before we start talking about productions suited to our conditions we have to see at what stage of theatrical evolution we stand. This attempt necessitates a survey of the Indian theatre from the period of the ancient classical theatre down to the modern theatre. As the present gathering is sufficiently aware of the evolution of theatre in India, I do not propose to go into full details but to survey rapidly the theatrical panorama of India.

Background

Unfortunately, the modern Indian theatre has developed haphazardly unlike any other theatre of the world due to the tremendous gap between the heritage of the classical Sanskrit theatre and the present day theatre. Unlike the Noh or the related Ningyo, Shibai and Kabuki theatre of modern Japan, which can trace their form and material from the ritual dances of the temples, from the Buddhist scriptures and from the abundant sources of poetry, myths and legends, both Chinese and Japanese, our theatre has no link with the centuries of tradition of the country. Unlike the theatre of England, France, Germany and other European countries, where the evolution of their respective theatres can be traced back to quite a long period, in India the modern theatre and the classical Sanskrit theatre have only the missing links in common. Unlike the present day Soviet Union, where professionals and amateurs are working in close harmony, in India there is no common meeting ground for the two.

The origin and early history of the classical Sanskrit drama remain matters on which little reliable information can be found. The earliest representation of plays appears to be associated with the religious observance of the people. In Greece, for example, the drama derived its origin from the hymns which were sung at the festival of Bacchus. In the Rigveda, we come across certain hints in the form of dialogues, some of which contain the dramatic flavour of conversation, speech and repartee. In Shukla Yajurveda, mention of the word 'Sailusa'

is found which means an actor. Samaveda with the hymns set to tunes show that the art of music was well developed in the Vedic age. In the Ramayana, reference to nata, nartak, nataka occur at a number of places. In some of the Puranas also, references to dramatic representations are found, particularly in Markandeya-Purana, we find the son of the King Shakrajit passing his days delightfully in the cultivation of drama. The *Arthashastra* of Kautilya gives us a light of information on the maintenance and working of *natakmandalies*, while Vatsyayana mentions writers on dramatic art of remote ages. Panini has also mentioned that 'acting has sufficiently developed and formulation of the principles of dramatic art in the form of Sutras is necessary' and he quotes the *Natasutras* in support of his argument.

The earliest treatise on the theory and practice of drama is the *Natyashastra* of Bharata. It is an extensive work which deals with every branch of the subject: theatre architecture, play production, play-writing, gestures, costumes, properties, music, dance and so forth. The theory and the practice of all the later dramatists were influenced by it. Later commentaries of drama like that of Abhinavagupta contain elaborations of the same basic material and add little that is new.

The most important feature of this theatre was not its physical shape but the convention on which the entire art of the performance depended. Both structure and characterization were as conventionally controlled as was the actor's gesture. Costumes, make-up, properties, gestures, movements were highly stylized, and since dance and music played an important role, this stylization was harmonized with other elements to make one unified whole. Movements of head, eyes, limbs were strictly set. Elaboration of dramatic mood (*rasas*) was done according to which the plays were classified. These conventions imply intimate understanding and appreciating knowledge on the part of the audience.

This dramatic tradition flourished in India for quite a long time. Writers like Bhasa, Shudrak and Kalidasa led it to the highest stage of perfection. Later works of merit are by Vishakhadatta, Bhattanarayana, King Harsha and Bhavabhuti. After this, the drama became more artificial and were more of literary exercises than good theatre due to the conservative adherence to the canonical rules. Due to this formalism imposed on it, theatre as such could not survive the impact of the Muslim conquests of India. The new rulers guided by the platonic philosophy of Islam, which called drama 'imitation of imitation', neglected this art. Thus the art of theatre, which for its upkeep had depended on the royal patronage, received a tremendous set-back.

The tradition then was inherited by the folk theatre and was carried in folk forms like Ramlila, Nautanki and Raslila of Upper India, Jatras in Bengal, Lalita in Maharashtra, Bhavai in Gujarat, Bhagavatam and Therukoothu of south India and romances of Gopichand, Puran and Hakikat in Punjab. Part of the tradition has also been preserved among the Chakkiars of Malabar. The regular formalistic stage, however, totally vanished so that we are dependent for our knowledge of it on books and to some extent on other artistic representations.

The Modern Period

In the 19th century, the modern theatrical movement started in different parts of the country

under the influence of the British, and attempts were made to revive the old classical plays. The inspiration mainly came from the English plays which were enacted by the then rulers for their entertainment. As early as the battle of Plassey, a regular theatre is said to have been in existence in Calcutta and run by one Mr Messinck, reported to have been sent to India by David Garrick himself. In the process of time, several companies sprang up in different parts of India. As a rule, in the beginning, the content of the plays was religious but the form and the style of presentation showed a marked influence of the stagecraft of the Occident. The content changed over to the romantic and later, one sees social problems being tackled particularly in Bengal and Maharashtra. It looked that the theatre was definitely in its full stride and one looked forward to prosperity and solid growth of the theatre movement in all provinces of the country in the years to come.

Unfortunately, this was not to be. On the theatrical horizon, loomed a black cloud—the spectre of cinema. It not only gave varied entertainment at a much lesser cost but also captured theatre halls. The competition between theatre and cinema proved to be disastrous for the former. The economic structure of the theatre tottered and from a serious cultural medium, the theatre became a business gamble. In the struggle between art and mammon, mammon survived. The producers started playing to the galleries and gave what they thought the people liked, spectacular shows, sumptuous scenes, catchy tunes, pretty faces, the humour of low comedians, sentimental happy ending and blood and thunder melodrama. In this competition of loud noises, the Parsi and Gujarati theatre 'out-Heroded Herod'. And the crash was inevitable. It was the case of a mill continuously flooding the market with a particularly loud design of a popular cloth which after a brief period of public fancy created a universal nausea. Most of the professionals, barring a capable few who realized their responsibility to theatre, lost the creative urge, and the downfall of the professional theatre became all the more speedy. In Bengal and Maharashtra, where the aesthetics of theatre had developed, the economics became such that most of the professionals were forced to desert the stage and take to screen.

At present, therefore, the number of professional companies is almost infinitesimal compared to the vastness of our country, and those that still exist are struggling hard to keep their heads above water.

I am afraid, I have painted a very gloomy picture of the state of affairs of the professional theatre. Let us see what has been done in the amateur field.

The amateur movement has been impeded seriously in this country by the sorry conditions of the professionals, as our amateurs are, unfortunately, inclined to blindly imitate the professional stage. On the other hand, the existence of the amateur is very necessary for the growth of the professional, as the amateur unhampered by pecuniary considerations can afford to concentrate solely on the art itself. He, therefore, has urge, keenness and enthusiasm to experiment with new forms and techniques in a big way. He is not daunted even if hundreds of his experiments failed. Some of them do succeed and the results are taken up by the professional. It is thus an experimental laboratory where the playwright, the actor,

the scenic designer, the lighting artist and the producer are initiated into the mysteries of their respective crafts. It thus becomes the source from which the raw material for the professional theatre comes, and consequently on its development depends the healthy growth of the professional theatre.

At present, our amateur theatre movement is spasmodic and uncoordinated. Most of the plays produced either follow antiquated techniques or fall prey to the realism of the screen, a different medium altogether. The very fundamentals of theatre craft are often a mystery to the average amateur group. At best, an amateur production is either a silly romantic love drama inspired from the films or originals and translations of occidental playwrights directed by a schoolmaster whose only qualification for producing a play is that he teaches Shakespeare to his class. The acting and the dramatic interpretation of the character are but vague and distorted imitations as seen on the screen, and impersonation and mimicry take the place of characterization. The results—poor they are—need not cause us much anxiety. Beginning always suffers from ill execution. But the attitude of our amateur to the stage production is a matter of grave concern. He does not realize that play production is a complex art which can only be mastered after years of practice. He thinks that after acting in a couple of plays, he has become an expert who knows all about acting. The successes which he thinks he has achieved in his two or three roles go to his head and the conviction grows that unlike any other form of art, the art of acting can come without proper training, right guidance and long and hard practice. Whatever is a truism for acting is truism for scenery, lighting and make-up. As for the producer, generally known as director, association with four or five productions is enough. This reminds me of Boyd who says that one has yet to see a bad amateur production from the 'audience' point of view. The audience of the amateur production mainly comprises of complimentary pass holders, relatives and acquaintances of the cast and management, and the unfortunate ones who are under the influence of the canvassers. To these, the actor or the producer has only to ask for opinions and get bouquets.

This casualness in production is also reflected when judges are appointed for competitions of many sorts which are continuously being held in the amateur theatre world. It is not realized that a stage production is a fusion of the efforts on the part of the playwright, the producers and the actor and, unless one is a critic of high calibre, it is not possible to disentangle these efforts of the three and assess their respective contributions. A conscientious person dare not accept to judge music competitions unless he knows the intricacies of the various ragas, nor would he accept to judge a dance competition without the intimate knowledge of the various styles of dancing, but talk of dramas and one finds him on the judgement seat, his only qualifications being a teacher or a professor, a high government official, a literary figure, a political leader. And if over and above he happens to have seen from near a couple of amateur productions, he is considered an authority. Incompetent judges will give correct judgement only by fluke or a lot of luck. Wrong judgement of an actor's ability, a producer's capability and a playwright's merit results in discouragement to the deserving and encouragement to those who eventually must fail. The sum total is that

the growth of the amateur is apt to get stunted.

Among this confusion, one can see a few streaks of light. One does meet talented producers who are serious in their approach to this art form but their number is, alas, very small. Also due to the vastness of the country, proper qualitative and quantitative evolution is not possible unless coordination at all levels is made and the collected data sifted. It is to be hoped that serious work in this direction shall be done and in the near future the amateur will attain its proper position.

Folk Theatre

Our survey shall not be complete without a reference to the folk theatre. As I said before, the declining traditions of the classical Sanskrit theatre continued to be found in the folk forms. At present, remnants of those production methods exist, thanks to the undeveloped means of communication in our country. With the development of communications in the country and the influx of the educated urbanite in the village due to the great silent revolution that is now taking place, the folk forms are at present in a grave danger of contamination by the decadent elements of the urban theatre. The harmonium has already penetrated in large areas and the gramophone is gradually silencing the musician. Unless those lovers of folk art seriously have a drive to stop this encroachment, before long the folk forms will emerge as cheap imitations of the city theatre. The only way he can develop the folk theatre of India is to write new plays with the style and technique with which the folk theatre is familiar and thus gradually create a sense of cultural awareness.

The following facts emerge from our survey of the theatre scene in India:

- (a) The existing professional companies are not in a position to renovate themselves and cater to a changed public taste as they cannot raise capital. The talented amateur groups which might have taken a regular theatre and formed professional companies are also in a sorry state as far as capital investment is concerned, and launching of professional companies with new blood is well-nigh impossible.
- (b) The zealous actor who would have at the cost of everything else joined the stage to give expression to this art is attracted towards the screen as a career, as the stage does not show any promise of providing him with adequate financial stability. Thus we get no new cadre for replenishing the already starving theatre companies.
- (c) Under the existing conditions, the professional companies have to move from place to place but the acute paucity of well equipped theatre halls available at reasonable rates has been a deterrent to their proper development. It is, indeed, deplorable that even the metropolis of India does not have a properly equipped hall within the means of all companies.
- (d) This economics of the present theatre, therefore, has directly affected the keenness for perfection in production. Not only the producer, the actor and the stagecraft men are martyrs to it but the playwright has also suffered in consequence. The writer of genius gets no opportunity and even if he gets one, it does not prove financially beneficial. Due to the dearth of professional companies, the necessary experience

of theatre is not available to the playwright in most of the provinces and one comes across a number of plays which are scholarly pieces but unsuitable for production. In India of today, when the people have realized the importance of establishing a truly Indian theatre with a definite personality of its own, the contribution of the playwright becomes all the more important as new plays are to be created with true Indian soul and full of tremendous enthusiasm of the free Indian nation. The vicious circle of no good play—no good production—no good audience response—no good income—no inspiration—no good play has to be broken.

Type of Production We Need

In the light of the above facts, then, what should be the type of productions to suit our conditions and yet to harmonize with our tradition and cultural background. There is no doubt that the theatre in India shall have to depend for its existence on the people and not on a particular class. The production must, therefore, be such as to enable the theatre to go to the people, theatre halls or otherwise, in the villages where eighty per cent of our people live. Consequently, the theatre must reorient its outlook and must become a part of the people drawing its inspiration directly from them.

Should we therefore switch on to the rules of production laid down by the great Bharata in the *Natyashastra*? In spite of all the above and regard for our tradition, we are compelled to say no. Like the human body, art has to grow and when the growth stops, like the human body, it dies. The rigid framework of the *Natyashastra* is insufficient to contain what the modern arts and sciences have to offer. There is no doubt that had the historical conditions in our country remained conducive to the unhindered development of the theatre movement from the times of Bharata, the *Natyashastra* would have been considerably amended. It is true that our past has been glorious but it would not justify our reverting back to bullock carts in this atomic age. India has to learn much from other countries where theatre has reached eminent heights, without being overawed by their progress and losing its own identity by mere imitation. We must utilize the modern methods of the theatre as far as we can, and if in this we have to modify the traditional theories, we must be prepared to do so. After all, it is practice that matters in the long run and not mere theory.

Many sciences are involved in the operation of the theatre; physics and chemistry aid in producing stage effects, lighting and dyes for scenery and costumes, psychology underlies the principles of acting and audience attention and others contribute many minor materials used to stage a play. Thus the theatre, through a fusion of the scientific and the artistic, is one of the most complex of arts. A division, however, has to be made in order to see the true relationship of the various components of stage production.

Acting

Let us, therefore, consider acting.

Actors and actresses work in the realm of creative imagination, if they are first class exponent of the art they exercise. But some thing more than creation, which is of course of

primary importance, is necessary than the aptitude and ability at imitation which are mere requisites. Imitation is easier than creation for the purpose of characterization. The truth is that the characters must be made to exist in the minds of the interpreter and its depiction must appear real to the audience. There is always a danger in absolute realism or in attempting 'to get near the truth'. It was Francisque Sarcey who once said that on the stage he liked the natural of arts but not the natural of nature. In other words, a play is not just a slice of life and acting is not simply a transfer of speech, movement and feeling from the street or the room to the stage. If nothing more than that was asked from the actor, every one could be one. But acting calls for the histrionic gift and for the technical ability to express it. Stage naturalness is not crude nature but the art of appearing to the audience to be natural and this naturalness has to be, as far as possible, at one and same time naturalness within the design of the part and naturalness acceptable to the audience. Anyone with the technical knowledge of acting is aware that a piece of acting, whatever be its period, shows, if studied from close quarters of the stage, highly accentuated values in much the same way as the facial make up of the actor.

In order to proceed further, we must analyze the component parts of the created art. Objects of art are formed from materials which are fashioned and shaped by tools according to a design and process. Thus, the three basic factors which are fundamental to every creation of art are materials, implements and design. Difficult though it is to readily discern the materials, tools and design in acting as confusion occurs due to the fact that the human body is used as material, tool and the art object. The various media that the actor employs are his body and voice and the materials are his imagination and experience, observation and body actions. On his general awareness of things about him, power of discernment, sympathetic understanding of life, ability to recall vividly and quickly past experiences depends the effectiveness of the materials. The characterization which the actor does must thus be commensurate with the emotional potentialities of his material.

The tools or implements are his voice and body, which are made sharp by training. The training, therefore, emerges as the last of the three fundamentals of an artistic creation that is technique or design. In this case, however, a fine distinction has to be made, for the technique employed in body and voice development will be a part of tools while its application in formulating a characterization will be considered as a part of design.

In order that the body may be a facile medium, the training of the body must be graceful and quick. The voice which is the most powerful but perhaps the most easily controllable medium must be developed in range, quality and volume, and it should not be considered something apart from body but a complement of it and a totality of bodily expression must be striven for. The technique of the actor is the entire process of his creation. It has been always in a process of gradual development ever since the time immemorial and it must not be rigid. It has to be adjusted to the needs of the role and the play.

Today, our theatre cannot count on the support of a small and exclusive group of theatre goers. Today, the theatre has to be creatively stimulated by the vast masses who are directly

engaged in reconstructing the country and who directly influence its art. The demands of these new and eager audiences are much more exacting and serious. The theatre now must not be merely an easily accessible and frivolous course of entertainment but a powerful artistic force for the re-education and reconstruction of men and women.

The actors' function then in building the new theatre goes beyond mere entertainment. He has to become a link in the chain of reconstruction. The old type of actor—vain, morbid and frivolous—has no place in our national theatre. His place has to be taken by a new type of actor who realizes his great responsibility to his audience, to his art, to his nation. He has to become the portrayer of great thoughts, profound problems, intense human emotions and passions. The acting has to be passionate, convincing witness to significant human lives and historical events. The actor now has to regard the theatre not as a soulless recreation, but as an art that has to be approached in all seriousness and with the greatest sense of responsibility. It can only be creative in the hands of those who love it and who understand and love the audience.

Finally then to the actor, I can say nothing more than quote Sarah Bernhardt:

By means of faith an actor who is badly endowed by nature will captivate a prejudiced audience. Faith will enable an artist to impose upon the public a fresh incarnation of a character already created by an actor of genius, which character adopted by successive generations has become the tradition.

In the theatrical career, as in other careers, there are misfits and failures who take up too much room, speak too loudly, stand bravely before crowds and fall victims to absinthe. The public often confuses them with true artists. But what does it matter. We artists follow our path so arduous, so full of snares but so bedecked with flowers. It is our mission to stimulate the minds and move the hearts of men. The poets and the dramatists entrust us with the finest product of their art. They place in our trembling and confident hands the quintessence, the generous thoughts they would sow in the hearts of crowds, the lesson they would teach society in an entertaining manner, without direct effort to the listener. And under the mask of laughter they extract from a ludicrous situation a new injunction against this or that abuse. And we are the advocates in these proceedings. We alone may communicate instantaneously to the public the ardent faith of the author. It is we who must, with one hand snatch away the tares and with other sow the good seed. Ah! what intense joy steals over the actor when he feels that a trembling audience is hanging on his lips and looks, while he knows that behind the scenes is a person whose heart is beating quickly, who has taken two years of his life to elaborate what often proves to be a masterpiece, who has erased, corrected, rejected words, sentences, lines, who has so much at stake, his future, sometimes even his daily bread, his glory, his all.

Scenery and Sets

When we think of play production, the next component after acting that demands consideration is the scenery. Let us, therefore, examine the place of scenery in play production. One comes across a number of definitions of scenery. What did few renowned artists and critics of the stage have to say about scenery? Gordon Craig says scenery or

scene should be the visual expression of the dynamic spirit of a play in all that comes before the eye. Adolphe Appie feels scenery, in its best sense, is the light and plastic elements, which by surrounding a living and active presence on the stage add to its vitality. Lee Simonson has much the same view; scenic art, he believes, to be the creation of plastic forms and spaces that are an integral part of acting and project its meaning. Sheldon Cheney declares that it must be an adequate and appropriate background for theatric action. Kenneth Macgowen similarly considers its function as an emotional envelope appropriate to the dramatic mood of the author, a visualization in colour, line and light of the dominant emotions to be pictured by the actors. Robert Edmond Jones says that scenery should be an environment of acting. Very interesting as these opinions are, they all boil down to one basic idea, that is, the purpose of scenery is to provide the right visual environment for theatric action.

Generally speaking, the purpose of scenery towards creating the right environment is fulfilled in three ways. Firstly, it fixes the locale of the action by realistic, impressionistic, stylized or formalistic treatment. Secondly, it helps to reinforce the theatric action. Thirdly the general function of scenery is to make the action of the play pictorially interesting. The scenery must, therefore, be such so as to place, reinforce and dress the action.

As said earlier, this placing of action can be done in a number of styles. Realism will take up the essential form like 'real' doors, 'real' trees and 'real' gardens and create a feeling in the spectators that they are seeing a real home or a real garden which people, not actors only, use. A word of warning, however, is necessary. The tendency of photographic accuracy in realistic set is to be avoided as it would interfere with the acting by distracting the attention of the audience. A good designer will always avoid over-detailed, elaborate, realistic setting and would leave many details of the scene to the imagination of the audience. Unlike realism, impressionistic or suggestive scenery does not give full details but merely indicates a scenic environment. For example, by intelligent execution, a throne placed before a tapestry can very well suggest a room in a palace, or a few tree trunks with a lot of shadows can give the suggestion of forest. In stylization, emphasis is placed not on natural forms but on the expression of an idea through more or less obvious external pattern to suggest some characteristics of the author and his theme. Formalism does not attempt to suggest any definite locality but marks a place for the action. Here use is made of platforms, steps and other plain architectural forms simply designed.

Scenery helps in reinforcing the action in a number of ways. For instance, from the general appearance of a room the tastes and habits of the people living in it can be suggested. Conditions surrounding the actions such as weather conditions, time of the day and season and physical circumstances of the characters can also be indicated.

The 'dressing' given to the action by the scenery is fulfilled when it is well designed. The surrounding forms must be arranged in an attractive composition in line, mass and colour so that the action takes in a constantly appealing atmosphere. Flat, monotonous backgrounds in lifeless colours are tiresome and irritating to look at. In nutshell, the scenery

must fulfil its purpose of stage decoration or decor.

Our survey of stage setting will not be complete without consideration of the stage properties, costumes and lighting. Properties have a strongly dramatic value in the setting. They serve the purpose of making intimate the visual scene as they relate directly to human action. They also have a decorative value as they form into a pleasing pattern harmonizing with the scenery. The properties considerably help to create naturalness in the business movements of characters. Care, however, must be taken that mere dumping of cart load of properties however carefully selected would clutter up the stage leaving hardly any room for action.

Costumes

Costumes also play a vital part in the composition of a stage design. Apart from the character which must be considered in designing the costumes, colour and line are equally important. The costume must help with every other detail of the production to express its meaning as a whole and the meaning of each individual character and his or her place in the play. The colour of costumes, to be effective, must be selected with an eye for contrast and harmony. Line is also of vital importance for it speaks as clearly as colour; for instance, long flowing lines can suggest dignity and age. I hope I am not making a very bold statement when I say that our producers—professional as well as amateurs—do not pay as much attention to the costuming of the play as it deserves. In case of the professionals, economic considerations take priority and generally whatever is available is made use of, while the amateur actor considers his main object is to make himself as lovely as possible. And, of course, he has a full freedom because often he has to procure his own costumes.

Lighting

The history of stage lighting is the story of development from the primitive to the complex, of the harnessing of scientific knowledge to theatrical purposes. The purpose of lighting is obviously to give visibility to the action on the stage, to heighten its emotional intensity, to create the right atmosphere and give emphasis on definite objects or characters. Thus, the first important function of lights is to enable an audience to see comfortably and clearly the stage picture. This, however, does not mean that everything on the stage should be evenly and monotonously illuminated. In such lighting, actors, properties and pieces of scenery all look flat and uninteresting. For objects to appear in their natural form, the distribution of light must have a high degree of variety produced by different levels of illumination. In fact, shade and shadows are equally important for revelation of three dimensional form. Again by light and colour, illusion of natural light indicating time of day, locale and season can be created. Light can also be used to heighten emotional and psychological effect of the stage action and scenery. Thus, stage lighting can be divided into two kinds, that is general illumination for audience to see the action, and specific illumination for various effects. The specific lighting, however, is only possible if the necessary equipment is available. It needs smaller and more efficient sources of light and controlling equipment capable of better production and control of the distribution of colour and intensity—special lanterns,

spotlights, dimmers, and a switch board.

We have seen how all the visual elements that surround an actor in his performance on the stage make the drama live for its audience at its highest possible emotional intensity. We have now to see how our productions can strive to reach the same peak in spite of the many adverse factors.

The construction of a right scenery for a play is not always expensive. A good artist with imagination and thorough understanding of the spirit of the play would be able to design pleasing and harmonizing scenery with cheap materials already available with most dramatic troupes or in the market. As I have already pointed out earlier that for its existence the theatre has to go to the people and, therefore, scenery should be capable of being easily and rapidly constructed, being easily packed and transported, and capable of withstanding strain and wear.

Lighting of our productions, however, is a difficult problem. The proper lighting equipment is expensive and, excepting in big cities, the amateurs and second-rate professionals have not even had an opportunity to learn the fundamentals of this particular craft. Keenness to gradually purchase the proper lighting equipment or to improve on the available resources in their case altogether missing. Lighting is a practical art, and it is only by experiments one can gain mastery of it. A good lighting is, however, an absolute necessity, and our productions are not likely to reach perfection unless the producers are conscious of the tremendous potentialities of lighting effects.

Make-up

I will dwell on make-up only briefly. Make up for the stage requires to be as scientifically and artistically applied as the scenery is designed. It is an instrument enabling players to give verisimilitude to their portrayal of characters and necessary in order to stimulate the imagination of the audience. It is, therefore, surprising that amateurs and professionals in the theatre are apt to underestimate the importance and value of this branch of play production and interpretation. Ignorance about both the science and the art of make up prevails. However natural actors and actresses wish to appear to an audience, it is essential for them to use make up on a lighted stage, as the strong lights make the face in its natural state colourless and devoid of expression. The strength of make up is also related to the size of the theatre.

One sees many obvious defects in make up as used in India. To enumerate a few, too much grease-paint, too heavy and too many lines to show age, too much cheek colour, overdoing the eye shadow and taking it too far up and not making up the hands. It is also noticed that sufficient thought is not given in selecting proper make-up material. These, however, are basic defects, and I hope that with the growing interest of the audience for good theatre, more attention will be paid to this branch of theatrical art.

The Producer

Brilliant actors, perfect settings, correct costumes and effective lighting alone will not harmonize by themselves unless there is some one in authority over the stage, the producer.

He is the man responsible for the presentation of the play as a completed whole. He plays the same role as that of the conductor of an orchestra. As he has to employ the material available to get the required results, he must know what the material is and how to use it. He has to understand acting, the designing of scenery and costumes, the use of lighting, and how to get any effect the play requires. He must also be able to interpret the play as a dramatic work. He may have to depend on other workers for scenery, costumes and the use of stage the same way as he depends upon his players. What he has to possess is the ability to act as their inspired leader. His personality must command respect and players must have confidence in him. His business, therefore, is to create. Unless the producer works as an artist, unless, that is to say, he has the power of imagination to call upon, he can do nothing.

Because so much is demanded of the producer, he is difficult to find. Good producers on the professional stage are scarce, on the amateur stage one meets them rarely. How, it may be asked, are we to get good producers? A good producer is not born, he has to become. Even the professional actor will not find it easy. The problem is more difficult for us as there are no schools where elements of the art of producing as such are included in the curriculum. Therefore, the only obvious way to be a good producer, provided one has personality, leadership, intelligence, imagination, talent and an infinite capacity to take pains, is to learn by practice, practice and practice. For a professional actor, there is the opportunity easily available but unless he is careful, he is likely to be turned into the 'star' producer. Just as 'star' actors can be relied upon to exhibit the familiar set of tricks or mannerisms for which they are famed and by means of which they never allow their audiences to forget who is playing the part, the 'star' producer makes a similar use of the theatre. One can know exactly what to expect in his production for every sort of play, under his ingenuity at the author's expense, and if he also happens to play a part, we might bet on the only horse running the race. He will be noted for his particular 'style' of treatment. His lighting effects will be always polychromatic and bright, or dim and colourless; the movement of his players will be always circular or diagonal, rapid or very slow; and his scenery and costumes will strike the all important 'new' note in a visual effect that is quaintly old fashioned, ultra-modern or just strikingly inappropriate.

For an amateur to become a producer is more difficult. He has to get as much practice as possible in producing plays, which means learning at other's expense. Be ready to produce for any club, any troupe or just merely a group, anywhere, for the sake of experience and learn by seeing plays produced by recognized producers.

One fact, therefore, fundamentally stands out that the standard of our amateur productions will not improve unless the realization of the importance and value of a good producer dawn on them. Thousands of plays are produced yearly in India by the amateurs in schools, in colleges, in private clubs during all possible fairs and festivals. The total expenditure on such performances would be colossal but all this yearly practice has done very little to improve our acting and our stagecraft. The reason is obvious. There are no qualified persons

to teach them even the rudiments of acting. And as for the theatre-craft, it is conspicuous by its neglect.

The theatre is bound to make progress in our country, in spite of all the handicaps we have. The concern is how soon is that going to be? If those connected with the theatre movement become conscious that the art of drama is as difficult, if not more, as the art of singing or the art of dancing and, like these two, the dramatic art also needs learning and hard work, we shall have got over the first and the biggest hurdle in our progress.

DISCUSSION

H.V. Gupte: I will skip over the paper I have written and come to certain suggestions which I will like to make for whatever worth they are. First of all, let me admit that I do not profess to suggest what the future productions should be like. I feel nobody can foretell it. Everybody should have full freedom to interpret the art as he is inspired to do, the theatre has to exist and has to be carried to the masses in the countryside. We should therefore have the bigger canvas in our view and must not be city-bound. It means that when we talk of the theatre, we must not keep ourselves confined to what the urban people would like to have but also what is urgently needed for the emancipation of the entire people. We have no theatre halls even in cities like Bombay. Obviously we cannot carry the picture frame theatre to the villages. From our discussions it has also come out that to make a production artistic and effective, settings and costly equipments, even lighting devices, are not necessarily unavoidable. You can use various styles. You can also evolve a style of your own getting the basic elements of folk-theatre.

Allow me to tell you briefly how a theatre in Orissa has been working for these years. Orissa you know is a poor State and Cuttack is not a very big town. But there are two theatres in Cuttack giving regular performances not only for the urban people but for the villagers too. Janata is the name of one such theatre. It is a cooperative concern. It has built up a house of its own. It has two teams, Janata A and Janata B. One of these teams serves the village folks. You will be interested to know how it works. It sends advance agents to villages. The villagers of Orissa are extremely theatre-minded. As soon as the advance agents of Janata reach a village, all the theatre-minded people of that particular village welcome them, play the host, and offer their full cooperation. They select the site. They themselves do the spade-work for the preparation of the arena. They dig pits, make the necessary slope by using their own spades. They collect benches and chairs from neighbouring schools. When the stage is thus set, the Janata troupe arrives while the advance agents move out to another village for the initial preparation for the next Janata performance there. Isn't it a wonderful work? Don't we need exactly this kind of cooperative work to make our theatre truly national? I am glad to know that you feel so. But there is one danger. The authorities will some day shout out why do you then clamour for play-houses? Look how ideally the Janata troupes are working in Orissa. Follow their examples. Surely we will follow their method but we will look for emulation too. And secondly, we have the city

people to consider also. It is for them and for the emulation of Janata type of work we badly need playhouses.

The dramatic art is not wholly a folk art. It has also a classic role to play. It has got to be sophisticated and a science of it must be formulated. When we think of it, we talk of setting, lighting devices, sound-proof houses, comfortable seats, in short, modern amenities and equipment. We should not be denied of them. Unless we get good halls and full equipment, we cannot give you plays that would please you and would prove themselves to be art creations. I will not describe the kind of halls we need. Shri Adi Marzban has written a paper on that particular aspect of theatre. Now, I will put forward a further demand. And that is construction of open-air theatres. We have the National Extension Service Blocks in the villages now, we have Social Education Organizers working in the Community Development Scheme. It is expected that they will encourage cultural activities of the village. It is their business to see that these blocks do get open-air theatres. If such theatres are founded, the theatre may easily be carried to the masses as travelling troupes will be relieved of the cost of building up a stage in every village they visit.

The Song and Drama Division has been subsidizing two hundred groups throughout the country. Some of them have been instructed to revive local amateur activities. I will give you an illustration of how the people react to the plays, the Song and Drama Division sends out to the village. You have heard of the play, *Hamara Gaon*. It had received both favourable and adverse comments from acknowledged authorities on drama. In this play, there is an incident which makes a rich landowner transfer, of his own will, some plot of land to the deserving but landless labourer. It succeeded in creating a tremendous effect. At three different places, rich land owners mounted on the stage during the recesses and declared that they would transfer such and such of their plots to such and such needy and deserving landless labourers. I don't say that *Hamara Gaon* is a standard play. It has its faults as well as merits. But the villagers found that the play had reflected what they had been suffering from, and had given them an indication of the approaching end to their life-long miseries. Now tell me dear artists, can any true artist dismiss the feeling of the people as a mere trifle? I am sure everyone of you has been longing for such thrilling experiences all through your life. I tell you, friends, things are happening to give us taste of a new life, a new awakening. But those are happening in the villages. Unfortunately, you are far away from them. You can have direct contact with the new surge of life, if you go to the villages with your troupes. It does not matter what form you take. Only be careful not to take with you a repertory of plays reflecting sophisticated life. But how can you go unless you get theatres, covered or open-air, in the villages? That is why I say let the Janata troupes work as they are doing but let us also carry the modern theatre to the villagers just to bridge the gulf that exists today. If our authors can get themselves associated with the villagers and workers, they can get a lot of materials. Also producers like Shri Sombhu Mitra and Mrs Dina Pathak can give the country things of which it might be proud of, if only they care to get actual contact with the people who are growing today in our villages. Much has been said on the type of plays we need. I stick to what I said earlier. Nobody can say that this type and this alone should be adhered to. We cannot make art of a formula or a form alone. Let everything be simple and understandable. Mrs Dina Pathak has wonderfully demonstrated how light effects may be made charming by the use of mere torches. I do personally feel that we kill drama in the city theatre

by too much lighting.

Now I would like to draw your attention to one more danger. Development Officers and Village Level Workers appointed by the government for rural development have started dabbling into folk-cultures. Unless their intrusion in this field is stopped immediately, they will spoil many folk forms by their foolish attempt to modernize them. These men have no knowledge of art-values. But being Government employees they have come to believe that they have a right to put their fingers in every pie. Let him give the village people stories and ask them to play them in their own style. Mrs Shrimati Tagore has apprised us that Tagore himself used to do it, and that his experiments had yielded good result. When we go to the rural artists we must not go as teachers but as learners. Only then we will be able to bring out the art that lies latent in them. When we succeed to do it, we succeed to let loose the stream of folk-arts which were lost amongst boulders and barriers artificially raised.

Before I take my seat, I will tell you a few words on criticism of plays. Well friends, this is not an easy job. You can write your impressions almost immediately after the final curtain falls on the play, but you cannot criticize the play unless you take into consideration not only the play, the performance, the technique and technical support of the play but also the background out of which grew the play and the entire environment. To acclaim or to condemn is no criticism. It does not help the growth of drama. If all the performers of a play, the playwright and the producer sit in a circle immediately after a play is over, and discuss their difficulties, their short-comings and their moments of happiness and distress while the show was on, this would certainly improve a play and its performance. That would be just the kind of criticism needed for the progress of theatre.

C.K. Phookan: We cannot stop criticism. And criticism, if it is hostile even, is certainly good. Plays are criticism of life and society. Those who write plays and produce them do indulge themselves in it. Why should they want the audience and the public to accept whatever they offer without comments? They are necessary for the development of drama and theatre. They should be welcome. Only we should not be shy of it. If we have confidence in the excellence and usefulness of our creations, we know where the critics are fair and where they are foul. We can correct our mistakes and at the same time we can afford to ignore the unjust comments complacently. Only we should not be touchy about it. I have seen how a troupe of artists sit round a table after a play is over and criticize one another's performance. They discuss every detail. I have watched them as a spectator and found them correcting one another without any sting. This is the kind of criticism we should welcome.

K. Narain Kale: I agree with Shri Phookan. Art creations are themselves criticisms. I cannot paint a picture if I do not see how my ideas have been reflected on the canvas by my own hands. I cannot go on writing without thinking of what I had written in the previous sentences. Criticism is a part of the process of creation itself.

Romesh Chander: While we talk against criticism we think of press criticism. Some of us feel that press critics are not serious about their business. They come to our performances, sit a while and then go out to prepare their copies without taking the trouble to see the whole of our efforts.

A Drama Critic: Not all the press critics are as indifferent to arts as the speakers describe them to be. The press has many competent critics who are no less lover of arts than the artists themselves. They come to see the performances with a desire to help the creation by comments and good publicity. They are not hostile to arts.

Romesh Chander: I am not complaining. I only referred to what some of our friends had said. I know we have a lot of good and competent critics in the press who always help us. But there are critics and critics. Some are good and others bad and indifferent and utterly irresponsible. It is only the latter that create a bad impression about our endeavours. We want them to be fair and friendly to arts, if not to artists. Personally I believe what Dr Mulk Raj commented at an earlier stage. He had very neatly put it in these words: "No bad criticism can frighten away good art."

Dina Pathak: I would like to know from Col. Gupte what does he exactly mean to say when he asks us to see that there is established a close contact and cooperation between the producer and the playwright? Will he allow the playwright to play a role in the production of his play? If he would, why then did he say that the producer should be given full freedom to revisualize and recreate what the playwright places with him for production?

H.V. Gupte: The producer is to create for an audience an illusion of the imagination the playwright puts in lines. Now, if a producer fails to get from the author's lines the spirit of the play, he would certainly misinterpret the author's work. That is why an author and a producer should have a closer relationship. Not only they should try to understand one another's view point but they should also see that each of them may be helpful to the other to attain their common objective which is giving a form to the author's idea. It occasionally happens that authors lack in practical knowledge of stage-crafts. But unless an author has that knowledge he cannot shine out as a brilliant playwright. He only comes in contact with the stage while his play is put under preparation. Why should he not be invited to attend rehearsals and to give the producer his comments and to get an inside view of how a play is mounted? The producer loses nothing by that. He rather gains in the sense that he gets at the spirit of the play from his discussions with the author which perhaps the author could not make sufficiently intelligible by the lines he had put. Shri Machwe had been talking of playwrights training. I feel that the rehearsals are the best lessons for playwrights. But there are authors who know of play-productions as much as a producer knows. And many are the innovations which originated with the author's imagination. A producer must have freedom too. But it must always be kept in view that his role is just to interpret or, if you would like to say, recreate the author's creation but never to give a form to a play which the author never imagined to convey. He must not 'out-Herod Herod', or he must not present a picture of Hamlet without any semblance of the Prince of Denmark about it. That is why I have remarked that a closer relationship should be established between the author and the producer.